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ABSTRACT

An intervention program was implemented to reduce absences, stimulate responsibility for assignments, and increase participation in extracurricular activities among disengaged ninth-grade students (N=18). Older students served as role models and peer mentors as they sought to establish that freshmen could control their own success or failure in the high school setting. Five intensive after-school workshops trained volunteer 11th-grade students (N=20) to serve as peer counselors. Emphasis was placed on a positive attitude toward helping others and on confidentially. Skills presented were basic counseling skills, active listening, effective message sending, values clarification, decision making, and goal setting. Mentors met assigned target students for lunch and talked with them on the telephone for the 3-month implementation period. The objectives of 98% average daily attendance, 100% participation in extracurricular activities, and 90% of the target group's classes showing no zeroes in teacher grade books were not achieved. Positive outcomes were much improved attendance and grades for 12 of the 18 targeted freshmen and improved grades among the mentor group. Freshman participants expressed an increased awareness of their ability to control their grades and of the value of involvement in the school community. Mentors felt the greatest benefits were showing disengaged students that someone cares and that if attitudes toward school could be improved needless failures and dropouts could be prevented. (Author/ABL)

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Establishing Locus of Control among Ninth Graders: Using Peer Mentors to Reduce Student Disengagement, Absenteeism, and Failures

by

Josephine T. Thompson

Cluster 37

A Practicum I Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1991

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

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This practicum report was submitted by Josephine T. Thompson under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

July 11, 1991
Date of Final Approval of Report

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ABSTRACT

Establishing Locus of Control among Ninth Graders: Using Peer Mentors to Reduce Student Disengagement, Absenteeism, and Failures. Thompson, Josephine T., 1991: Practicum I Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Descriptors: Peer Mentors/Peer Counseling/Attendance/Absenteeism/Disengagement/Isolation /Alienation/At-risk students/Locus of Control/Self-worth/Self-image/Failure/School Success/Motivation/ Dropouts/Extra-curricular activities.

This practicum aimed to reduce absences, stimulate responsibility for assignments, and increase participation in extra-curricular activities among disengaged ninth grade students. Older students served as role models and peer mentors as they sought to establish that freshmen could control their own success or failure in the high school arena.

Five intensive after-school workshops trained twenty volunteer eleventh grade students to serve as peer counselors. Emphasis was placed on a positive attitude toward helping others and confidentiality. Skills presented were basic counseling skills, active listening, effective message sending, values clarification, decision making, and goal setting. Mentors were instructed in recordkeeping tasks to aid in collecting data for this practicum and to determine their grades in the half-credit peer counseling course. Mentors met assigned target students for lunch and talked with them on the telephone for the three month implementation period.

Objectives of 98 percent average daily attendance, 100 percent participation in extra-curricular activities, and 90 percent of the target group's classes showing no zeroes in teacher grade books were not achieved. Positive outcomes were much improved attendance and grades for 12 of the 18 targeted freshmen and improved grades among the mentor group. Freshmen participants expressed an increased awareness of their ability to control their grades and of the value of involvement in the school community. It is hoped that a sleeper effect will result in increased extra-curricular involvement next school year. Mentors felt the greatest benefits were showing disengaged students that someone cares and that if attitudes toward school could be improved needless failures and dropouts could be prevented.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community and Work Setting

The nine-year-old high school under study is the only one in a rural county of cattle ranches, citrus groves, and vegetable crops, an area dependent upon seasonal migrant workers for the harvesting of fruits and vegetables. Although the entire range of socioeconomic levels is represented in the county, the predominant group is lower middle class. The conservative community has less than four thousand residents and serves as the county seat for a stable population of about eighteen thousand permanent residents.

The high school serves approximately one thousand students including migrants from throughout the county in grades nine through twelve. The school population is predominantly white with ethnic breakdowns of 64.5 percent white, 11 percent black, 24 percent Hispanic, and .007 percent other races. The ten year accreditation review for the Southern Association of Colleges and High Schools will begin next school year.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer was one of two senior high school guidance counselors on eleven-month contract, held a master's degree in guidance and counseling, and had twenty-nine years experience in education. Duties included scheduling and advising students, arranging and supervising a variety of tests, dispensing information regarding test results, consulting with parents and with teachers, dispensing college and financial aid information, coordinating dual-enrollment programs with the nearby community college, and the staffing of all special education students, in addition to personal counseling with the school population.

Other responsibilities included writing frequent columns for the weekly county newspaper that were designed to keep parents and students informed of scholarships, deadlines, tests, and other happenings of note at the high school. Arranging and administering college entrance exams, both ACT and SAT, on eight Saturdays during the year was another responsibility. The writer served on the steering committee for the newly formed Teacher Advisement Program and was responsible for the scheduling and tracking of all students in that program and, like other staff members, served as advisor to a group of fifteen students in weekly meetings.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The problem needing improvement was support services to ease the transition of middle school students to the high school setting. Freshmen had higher rates of absenteeism than any other class of students, which led to failures and appeared to be a precursor to dropping out of school. Freshmen had more failing grades than any other group of students, generally lacking study skills and the ability to plan and work toward passing grades in an organized and focused manner. Many freshmen seemed to feel they had no control over their grades, and failed to see that they could manage their own success or failure.

Daily attendance sheets clearly revealed that absences occurred more often in the freshman class than in sophomore, junior, or senior groups. However, attendance statistics on a long-term basis did not break down differences in class absenteeism. Over a five-year period, first semester report cards consistently revealed that nearly one-third of the freshmen have two or more

failing grades. The dropout statistics for the same time period documented the highest number of dropouts as ninth graders at the time of dropping out of school.

Very few freshmen were actively involved in clubs or extracurricular activities unless they were athletes. Student disengagement manifested itself in high absenteeism and isolation from the mainstream of school society, and non-participation was evident in many dropout exit interviews. The inability to internalize perseverance, attendance, and participation as desirable means to success resulted in no locus of control and student disengagement leading to failure and/or dropping out of school.

Problem Documentation

While year-end documentation was not available by class groups, freshmen absences ranged from 35 to 45 percent of total daily absentees. Dropout statistics documented more students in the freshman class than in any other class at the time of dropping out of school and accounted for 42 percent of the total yearly dropouts in 1989-90. Of the number of freshmen beginning ninth grade, usually about 350 students, approximately half received diplomas four years later.

A survey of freshmen students revealed 57 percent of the current class were not participating in any

extracurricular activities at the high school and only 23 percent joined clubs for the 1990-91 school year. An additional 10 percent of the freshmen were involved with a sports team and another 10 percent were in band, flag corps, or drill team (see Appendix A).

Causative Analysis

It has been observed by the writer that freshmen students tend to function in the immediate present without long-term goals. Freshmen have not previously had the responsibility for their own make-up work after missing a class, and adjusted poorly to high school expectations of responsibility acceptance and mature behavior.

Freshmen did not perceive the effect of one or two forgotten assignments on overall grading procedures. There was no organized system of teaching the grading procedures, the requirements for graduation (printed in the student handbook and in the program of studies), the accumulation of credits toward a diploma, or the computation of grade point averages.

The writer observed a general lack of concern regarding grades and a lack of study skills among ninth grade students. It has been their custom to complete assignments within a class period, and when the three-o'clock bell rang, school was over for most freshmen.

They seemed to lack the desire and the ability to plan and organize for better grades.

School refusers have high absenteeism and believe they have little control over their academic performance, displaying little sense of purpose and a poor understanding of causes of failure or success. Students marking time until they can quit have also been found to possess very little motivation, no vocational goals, and show little participation in extracurricular activities (Hathaway and Rhodes, 1979; Ficula, et al., 1983).

Thompson (1987) cited a survey that indicated school performance to be a major concern of students in the fifth through the ninth grades. The survey also revealed a decline in academic motivation and interest in school between fifth and ninth grades.

Disliking school was found by Dunham and Alpert (1987) to be a strong predictor for dropping out. They emphasized that students do not need to be consistently successful to enjoy the school experience, but point out that it is the major arena for development of the adolescent identity.

School climate that fosters an uncaring attitude exacerbates the problem for freshmen. Middle-class standards are reflected through the actions of both students and teachers, often speeding the low-status

student's decision to escape. Some teachers have a tendency to be punitive and may have no qualms about humiliating students, thus contributing to feelings of not belonging and of worthlessness (Lynn, 1986; Larsen and Shertzer, 1987; Calabrese, 1988).

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The growing numbers of students who choose not to participate in the mainstream of the school is recognized as a major problem. Student disengagement manifests itself in a low level of student participation in school, negative attitudes about school, and absenteeism, each of which interferes with attempts to educate those students (Natriello and Scott, 1981). Such students feel rejected and alienated, outside the mainstream of school society, "exhibit passive withdrawal and become nonstatistical dropouts" (Calabrese, 1988, p. 325) until they do drop out.

Students have a need for success, for caring, understanding, identification, and recognition. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs places belonging, esteem, and self-actualization just above the physiological and safety needs. Carl Rogers used the term "fully functioning" and Eric Fromm used the term "autonomous" to refer to persons with self-direction, a liking for self,

and a feeling of belonging (Frey and Young, 1979; Bradford, 1981; Besecker and Aug, 1985).

Ware and Gold (1970) emphasized the needs common to all students as they described the Los Angeles City College Peer Counseling Program: the need for a sense of belonging, the need for respect from peers, the need to communicate with peers, the need for assurance in peer relationships, the need to talk with someone who sincerely empathsizes with them, and the need for a sense of self-worth. They felt responsibility for meeting those needs to be justification enough for a peer counseling program.

Participation in extracurricular activities provides a setting in which the adolescent may deal with the eight developmental tasks deemed necessary by Havighurst (1949), particularly the tasks of achieving masculine or feminine roles, accepting one's body and using it, forming more mature relationships with agemates, and acquiring a set of ethics as a behavior guide. The high school is the arena for the socialization of the adolescent (Haensly, Lupkowski, and Edlind, 1986; Dunham and Alpert, 1987).

Calabrese (1988) referred to students who attend but do not actively participate in school as nonstatistical

dropouts. In his opinion, adolescent disengagement is a form of alienation with feelings of isolation and a lack of meaning in life. The climate and structure of the school can exacerbate the student's alienation and sense of powerlessness. Reducing that alienation is related to the extent that "adolescents feel a part of society in general and school in particular" (p. 327).

Schools operate with middle class values that favor students from that class; therefore, lower class students have difficulty attaining status in the school's hierarchy. Elliott, Voss, and Wendling (1966) observed that dropping out may be both an acceptance of, and an escape from, low social status. Wagner (1984) pointed out that poorer students often must work after-school jobs and do not have the minimum supplies and clothing needed for school. Extracurricular activities are costly to them, both in time and in money. Likewise, they have have little energy and time for study and homework preparation. Teachers often have low expectations for such students, exhibit uncaring attitudes, and eventually both students and teachers give up. Wanting to be involved but feeling unaccepted produces a conflict often resolved by retreating to familiar ground, according to Schotzinger (1976). Again, the fate may be accepted as the student turns to peers and those places where he

feels comfortable and has some sense of self worth. Mahan and Johnson (1983) found that many dropouts believed they did not belong in school and that no one was interested in them. Thompson (1987) indicated that students who are not very successful in school have frequent reminders of the fact by their exclusion from all the incentives that reward the successful students: praise, recognition, grades, special privileges, special club memberships, and academic tracking. When a lack of incentives is coupled with disparagement from teachers and other students, a debilitating school climate exists.

Ignoring motivation, that basic condition for learning, and improving school programs would be futile. Not only students but teachers need to be motivated for effective learning to take place, as the concept of motivation is tied inexorably to self-esteem, positive expectations, and reinforcement. Low-motivated students can be helped by enhancing their self-image, increasing their successful experiences in school, improving their attendance, and increasing their motivation through concentrated effort. Challenging instructional programs that require full student participation are necessary if the disengaged student is to be reached (Thompson, 1987; Bradford, 1981; Byrne, 1981; Stanley, Goldstein, and Bry, 1976).

Straight, Incorporated, directs its treatment of drug addicts toward rebuilding a sense of self-worth. Alcoholics Anonymous and Weight Watchers rely on peers helping peers, an idea that has been around for a very long time. It is a natural tendency to seek advice from friends, and peers have always supported peers in family, neighborhood, and church. However, lifestyles have changed and social-emotional needs are not so easily met (Bedecker and Aug, 1985; Chaney, 1982; Schweisheimer and Walberg, 1976). Farrell (1985) observed that peer counseling has never been more evident than in America today with the vast numbers of support groups and self-help groups, and the power of such peer help is in the non-threatening approach that enables people to interact in positive ways with a minimum of training and expense. Additional value is found in the team spirit generated and in the improved school climate that develops (Besecker and Aug, 1985; Lynn, 1986; Farrell, 1985).

There is a consensus in the literature that student disengagement is manifested in absenteeism, non-participation in school activities, low grades, and dropping out of school. The literature reveals no definitive agreements regarding the cause of student alienation but includes many indicators of the symptoms. Recurring themes in the literature revolve around the

common needs of belonging and feeling a sense of self-worth. Critical teachers with low expectations contribute to debilitating school climates in which students feel alienated or isolated. Peer counseling, peer mentors, and peer facilitators are programs that provide role models and positive peer interaction, enhance self-esteem, and generate a team spirit of caring concern in schools. Searching the literature for disadvantages reveals none as long as care is given in the choice of the peer role models.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and objectives were projected for this practicum: (a) reduction of student absences, (b) increased participation in extracurricular activities, and (c) increased student responsibility for grades and assignments. It was expected that a reduction in absenteeism would have an impact on grades as well as student disengagement. Increasing participation in extracurricular activities was another goal that sought to alleviate isolation and alienation. The third goal was stimulating student responsibility for grades and assignments with the expectation that students would realize how they can affect and control their grades.

Behavioral Objectives

Improved school attendance, expected to be an average of 98 percent, was a necessary component of the practicum proposal and affected all other components. Attendance was monitored on a weekly basis by the mentor group of students through zero and absence checklists from teachers and the final evaluation measure was attendance daily records.

Increased involvement in extracurricular activities was expected from each member of the target group. The

activity could be joining a club, participating on an athletic team, or even serving on a committee such as float-building or dance decorations. Self-reports, verified by mentors, were the evaluation measure with 100 percent involvement anticipated for the target group.

Improved effort toward grades was expected from the target group. Counting zeroes in teacher grade books was used as the final evaluation measure with the expectation that 90 percent of the classes of the freshmen target group would have no zero grades.

Measurement of Objectives

Measuring attendance was accomplished through the records of each teacher by periods. Mentors placed zero and absence checklists (see Appendix B) in cooperating teachers' mailboxes at the end of each week; most teachers returned them at the beginning of the following week. However, too many missing checklists prohibited their use for final measurement. Final checks were accomplished directly from teacher attendance/grade books at the end of the implementation period.

The measurement of involvement in extracurricular activities was accomplished through a student response form (see Appendix C) and verified through peer mentor checks with group sponsors. It was expected that each member of the target group would be involved in some school activity.

To ascertain the success of goal-setting and increased responsibility regarding grades, teacher grade books were used at the end of the implementation period. Rather than concentrating on passing grades for all the target group during the short implementation period, the measurement was focused on zeroes in the grade books. It was expected that 90 percent of the classes would be no-zero classes.

Mentors served as role models, advisors, and reinforcers. Records were kept of personal and telephone contacts with the target group using log books, and zero/absence check sheets were collected from teachers weekly. Both mentor group and target group evaluated the project with checklists and comments at the end of the implementation period (see Appendices D and E).

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

The problem perceived by the writer was the failure of many middle-school students to make a successful transition to the high school community. Freshmen students had high absenteeism, high dropout rates, high percentages of failing grades, and a noticeable lack of involvement in extracurricular activities at the high school.

Phillips (1980) described a California project to Help Overcome Learner Dropouts (Grab H.O.L.D.) as a successful prescriptive counseling program that included peer counseling. Students were helped to develop and implement their own success objectives by using strateagies to change unsuccessful behaviors. Warm and supportive peer counselors, trained to recognize when students felt overwhelmed or frustrated, were a major factor in the help program. After three years' implementation, results showed 72 percent of the targeted potential dropouts remained in school.

Hathaway and Rhodes (1979) maintained that prevention was better than remediation techniques when

dealing with the potential dropout. For the student marking time until he can quit school, self-image enhancement programs, good role models, and individualized instruction offered the best chances of improving student attitudes. For the student who had no goals, little or no motivation, and little desire to participate in extracurricular activities, a meaningful program that focused on career, academic, and personal counseling could help to lessen the feelings of alienation and rejection from the school society.

A common thread running through the literature was attendance improvement with incentive programs, peer and parent counseling programs, and a variety of meaningful educational programs from which students may choose (deJung and Duckworth, 1986; Duckworth, 1988; National School Boards Association, 1984). Votaw (1987) especially espoused increased participation of parents with frequent counselor contacts and evening parenting sessions.

Duckworth (1988) found older students assigned to be a big brother or sister to freshmen provided much-needed assistance and guidance on a regular basis. Phillips and Rosenberger (1983) noted that big brother/big sister meetings with ninth graders resulted in dramatic changes in the lives of the helper as well as the younger

students being helped. Shapiro (1988) pointed to an increased awareness over the past ten years of the value of using peers to assist academic performance. He stated there are literally hundreds of studies where a feedback or reinforcer for academic behavior brought improvement in academic skills. One such recommendation came from the National School Boards Association (1984) and recommended a morning study table for homework assistance for athletes, supervised by coaches, for an hour before school begins each morning.

Phillips (1980) peer counseling proposal contained many usable strategies for this practicum, as did Hathaway and Rhodes (1979) role model approach. The incentive programs advocated by deJung and Duckworth (1986) were not feasible as several new school programs were underway that addressed many of their ideas. Votaw's (1987) emphasis on parent involvement and parenting sessions did not have potential for a short-term implementation period as many families had two parents working. The big brother/big sister approach with ninth graders advocated by Duckworth (1988) and by Phillips and Rosenberger (1983) had merit and coincided nicely with the role model and peer counseling approaches of Phillips (1980) and of Hathaway and Rhodes (1979).

Description of Selected Solution

A mentor approach included aspects of peer counseling, role models, and big brother/big sister contacts with ninth grade students who appeared to show signs of being misfits in the high school society. Where the term "peer counselor" could raise objections from more conservative members of the community and school board, the term "mentor" had no connotation that could raise objections.

Many new incentive programs and dropout prevention programs were underway in the school: an attendance policy rewarded students with two or less absences with exemption from final exams, and perfect attendance rewards were planned. A three-hour construction class, morning and afternoon sessions, taught carpentry skills as students built a house from the ground up. A dropout prevention program served eighteen freshmen and eighteen sophomores with self-contained academic classes in the morning and on-the-job training in the afternoons. A program for young mothers provided a similar experience with the added attraction of day-care for their youngsters. The new Teacher Advisement Program sought to extend a caring atmosphere, a feeling of belonging, and an understanding of credits and graduation plans. An after-school peer tutoring program paid better students

four dollars an hour for tutoring less able students in a caring atmosphere, providing free homework help and transportation.

A mentor approach that concentrated on feelings of self esteem, goal setting, and peer reinforcement differed from the new programs. The many positive aspects of peer counseling are documented in the literature review, and are a powerful approach to enhancing school performance and participation of the disengaged student. The three-month implementation period necessitated keeping both mentor group and target group small in order to maintain adequate supervision. Junior volunteers were mentors because they had transportation, had greater potential as older role models, and because their presence on campus next year would be valuable if the program were expanded. The principal approved one-half credit for mentors in Peer Counseling I, with objectives as listed in the state course code directory.

Report of Action Taken

A letter of invitation (see Appendix F) was distributed to forty juniors, good students and role models, and included an invitation to their friends. All 20 volunteer mentors who filed applications (see

Appendix G) at the first meeting were accepted after evaluation of their schedules and input from their parents. As after-school training sessions were implemented promptly, many later applicants were turned away.

The target group was selected from referrals from teacher advisors (Teacher Advisement Program) and from other teachers in a faculty meeting explaining the planned proposal (see Appendix H). Targeted students all had grade point averages below 2.0 and displayed a lack of interest and motivation. The target group matched the mentor group in number, and final selections were based on mutual lunch periods with mentors.

Mentors were chosen before the target group in order to proceed with their five-session training according to state curriculum frameworks, a state-approved textbook, and related materials collected by the writer. After-school training sessions with the twenty enthusiastic junior class volunteers were well-attended and exciting to teach. The mentors were to provide role models and peer counseling to disengaged freshmen through the use of encouragement, reinforcement, and listening/counseling skills; in this way, desirable behaviors were to be shaped and self-images were to be enhanced in the

targeted group of students. During the training meetings, emphasis was placed on a positive attitude toward helping others, and skills presented were: active listening, effective message-sending, self-awareness, helping skills, basic counseling skills, confidentiality, values clarification, decision-making, starting/ending relationships, goal-setting/ attainment/monitoring, and recordkeeping/meetings/telephone calls. Although personal growth was anticipated for the mentors as well as the target group, a structured approach was necessary for the attainment of goals that could be measured at the end of the time frame.

CALENDAR

November 28	FIRST MEETING WITH MENTOR GROUP: application forms explanation of project questions answered confidentiality discussed
December 4	FIRST TRAINING SESSION: self-awareness initiating interactions active listening skills effective message-sending
December 5	SECOND TRAINING SESSION: active listening identification and observation of non-verbal behaviors basic helping skills confidentiality
December 6	FACULTY MEETING: explanation of project to faculty and referral forms for target group selection

December 10	THIRD TRAINING SESSION: effective message-sending basic counseling skills realistic goal-setting
December 12	FOURTH TRAINING SESSION: basic counseling skills abuse, depression, suicide when to refer confidentiality
December 13-14	SELECT TARGET GROUP OF STUDENTS MATCH TO MENTOR GROUP
December 17-21	PREPARE RECORD-KEEPING NOTEBOOKS & CALENDARS FOR MENTOR GROUP
December 21 thru January 7	CHRISTMAS BREAK
January 8	FIFTH TRAINING SESSION: values clarification differing values decision-making; explore options goal setting/attain/monitoring recordkeeping for project
January 9-17	CONSENT OF TARGET STUDENTS INTRODUCTIONS INDIVIDUAL BASIS GETTING ACQUAINTED SUPPORT THROUGH EXAMS
January 15	MEETING WITH MENTORS AFTER SCHOOL: emphasis on extracurricular involvement; explain why zero/absence checks explained and filled out
January 17-25	ZERO/ABSENCE CHECKS IN MAILBOXES BY January 25
January 28-29	Returned first zero/absence checks to mentors; discussed with mentors
January 31	FIRST NOTEBOOKS DUE: including logs of contacts, first zero/absence checks, worksheet assignments

February 5	FIRST PERIOD MEETING: zero/absence checklists and notebooks returned to mentors and discussed
February 11-12	Returned third batch of zero/absence checks and emphasized Valentine's Day
February 18-19	Returned fourth batch of zero/absence checks and notes to mentors
February 25-26	Returned zero/absence checks and emphasized Pioneer Park Days
February 28	SECOND DUE DATE FOR NOTEBOOKS
March 4-5	Returned zero-absence and notebooks with helpful comments
March 11-12	Returned...emphasis on St. Patrick's
March 18-19	Returned zero-absence checks
March 25-26 April 1-7	Returned...emphasis on Easter and Spring Break
April 8-12	Verification of extracurricular response forms, final evaluations, final notebooks due by APRIL 15.

After using first period as a group meeting with all mentors, the writer was forced to deviate from the plan of nine such meetings due to workload at school. Frequent contacts with mentors were accomplished through individual meetings, notes, and telephone calls after school hours. The time span of the practicum was originally planned for the second quarter of the school year. Although mentor training was approved early, a loss of plans through the mail delayed final approval

until mid-January, thus moving the practicum implementation into third quarter. During that time frame, the writer is traditionally occupied with statewide assessment testing, schoolwide achievement testing, pre-registration and scheduling of students for the coming year. Close supervision and follow-up of developing problems became a major obstacle. A get-acquainted party with refreshments and an ending luncheon party were deleted from the original plans. The original ending date had to be moved after spring break; therefore, data could not be collected and analyzed during that week as planned.

Initial response from the thirty-seven teachers of the targeted pupils was enthusiastic and supportive. Response to the weekly zero/absence checks eventually declined, and five teachers ignored the forms for the entire practicum, reinforcing the directive that data collection should be under the immediate control of the practicum director. The zero/absence checklists were used as tools for mentor counseling, but not as a means of collecting data as planned.

Two of the twenty original mentors dropped out of the practicum after training, and two others later became too involved with personal problems to maintain quality contact with their assigned students. The mentors who

dropped out were never matched to ninth grade students, but the two uncommitted students and their assignees became part of the ending evaluation data.

Choosing mutual lunch periods for the major contact time was thought to be convenient and saved pulling the students from classtime, but in reality was not an appropriate period for sharing. Matching ninth grade students' lunch periods to eleventh grade students' lunch times was more difficult than anticipated and resulted in the deletion of some excellent referred prospects.

While females readily agreed to participation in the practicum project, males did not, and many refused. The male proclivity toward reluctance in sharing feelings was overlooked. Quick acceptance was noted only when the older male was involved with sports. Three freshmen males were stunned when the football team's quarterback entered our meeting, and one young man commented: "We ain't got nothing to lose!"

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

Absenteeism and failures among ninth grade pupils are chronic concerns in the writer's work setting. Coupled with disengagement and isolation from the mainstream of high school society, these factors place such students at high risk for dropping out of school. Statistics from the previous school year indicated 42 percent of the dropouts were in ninth grade. Exit interviews revealed a lack of involvement in extracurricular activities and indicated that students felt they had no control over their success at school.

Reducing absences and stimulating responsibility for assignments was expected to have an impact on grades and locus of control. Isolation and alienation were addressed through caring, concerned mentors who stressed extra-curricular involvement.

Weekly zero/absence checklists were collected from teachers of 18 freshmen and used as counseling tools by 18 junior mentors who met their assigned students at lunch. Weekly telephone dialogs were a part of the contact plan, as were special remembrances at holidays.

The mentor approach was designed as a big brother or sister who exhibited caring concern and tried to reinforce desirable behaviors and enhance self-esteem. Goal-setting and attainment were emphasized in a decision-making context without formal contracts.

Improvement of school attendance was a major focus of the practicum. The goal of 98 percent average attendance for targeted students was not met, although 12 of the 18 pupils improved in attendance and three-fourths of the improved group had 98 percent or better attendance. The average daily attendance (ADA) during the practicum period was measured at 86 percent (see Table 1). Reduction of absences among males showed greater gains than among females.

Table 1

Average Daily Attendance of Target Group

Group	Qtr. 2 Absences	Mean ADA	Qtr. 3 Absences	Mean ADA	End
Males N=9	61	85%	52	87%	2% gain
Females N=9	41	90%	58	86%	4% loss
Totals	102	87%	110	86%	1% loss

The three-month implementation period was too brief to use grades as a measure of improvement. Concentrating on locus of control and emphasizing the effect of missed assignments on overall grades, zeroes were counted from teacher grade books. It was anticipated that 90 percent of the classes of the target group would have no zeroes but the objective was not met. Two students had no zeroes in five of their seven classes, four students had no zeroes in four, two students had no zeroes in three, three students had no zeroes in two, and five students had no zeroes in one of their classes for a total of 43 no-zero classes out of a possible 126. To have achieved the original objective, 113 no-zero classes needed to be tallied.

Extracurricular involvement was the third objective of the practicum anticipated for each member of the targeted group. Measurement was accomplished through student response forms and verified by the mentors with a finding of 11 students involved in some school activity.

Discussion

Although objectives for the practicum were not met, 12 of the 18 target students improved their attendance record with four having perfect attendance and four having 98 percent attendance. Poorest attendance was

noted among four who had a history of excessive absences and who continued in that pattern, missing 13, 18, 19, and 20 days out of the 45 days of Quarter 3. Their inclusion in the practicum group indicates poor selection choice for gaining short-term results.

One of the poor attenders had chronic health problems and an over-solicitous mother. Another had such serious emotional problems that psychotherapy was recommended; recognition of her problems was a direct consequence of a concerned peer mentor. A third poor attender was suffering through parental divorce. A fourth encountered legal repercussions after breaking the law.

A detailed investigation of the target students revealed that 12 of the 18 were children of divorce, some living in single-parent homes and some living in blended families. Children's negative reactions to divorce are well-documented in the literature. Feelings of loss, emptiness, abandonment, being unloved, and experiencing a loss of security are listed by many researchers (Schreier and Kalter, 1990; Bundy and Gumaer, 1984; Omizo and Omizo, 1988; Ricci, 1980; Admunson-Beckmann and Lucas, 1989; Cantrell, 1986; Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird, 1980). These feelings plus depression, anxiety, and withdrawal have been noted to be more severe for males

than for females (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1885; Kalter, 1989; Guidubaldi and Perry, 1985; Guidubaldi, Perry and Nastasi, 1987) although a recent study by Wallerstein and Corbin (1989) found psychological adjustment split evenly between both genders. Diminished parenting abilities and lack of control in divorced families have been found to lead to academic difficulties such as short attention span, high distractibility, and lack of persistence on tasks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Greer (1991) states that a critical variable differentiates at-risk students from others: locus of control, meaning success or failure is attributed to anything but their own efforts. Cantrell (1986) and Omizo and Omizo (1988) also stress that divorce can diminish children's sense of control. Because of a devalued sense of self, and because of at-risk factors that are shaping them at the time of divorce, children lack a sense of mastery over their own lives.

Total involvement in school activities was not achieved with the sample group. Since all possible activities are after school hours, freshmen inability to drive vehicles was cited as a contributing factor by peer mentors. Club membership drives occur at the beginning of a school year; therefore, mid-year joining of a club

would be unlikely unless an older student or the club sponsor intervened.

Many clubs have prerequisites to membership, such as taking an agricultural class in order to become a member of Future Farmers of America, or being elected to membership as in Student Council or Key Club. Sporting activities have starting dates at various times during the year, but require a 1.5 grade point average which most of the target students did not have. Since clubs usually sponsor dances, there was no opportunity for non-members to help with dance decorations. Float-building was an easy activity to join, and this opportunity for involvement appealed to several of the ninth grade students. Target student evaluations indicated all but two of the freshmen plan to become more involved in school activities next year.

Controlling the number of zeroes in gradebooks was expected to improve grades among the target group. Although the objective of 90 percent having no zeroes was not met, 12 of the 18 target students improved their grades with four students surpassing a 2.0 grade point average. Report cards were not the means of measurement for this objective, but close examination reveals an average gain of .64 in grade point average from Quarter 2 through Quarter 3 grading periods. Shapiro's (1988) review of the literature mentions hundreds of studies

where a reinforcement for academic behavior brought improvement in academic skills, and he maintains the use of peers to assist academic performance is a significant intervention procedure. Sixteen of the target students believed they had more awareness of grades and would be taking more responsibility for making good grades as a result of the practicum.

All of the mentor group were good students with grade point averages exceeding 2.5, and most above 3.0. Two of the mentors demonstrated a dramatic increase in grade point average, supporting Phillips and Rosenberger's (1983) finding of positive results in the lives of the helpers as well as younger students being helped.

Other value to mentors is observed through their comments on evaluations of the project:

> I found a deeper appreciation for who I am.
> It made me realize how I take things for granted while others have to struggle for those things.
> I learned that others view situations differently from me.
> I found that I can appreciate the parental support that I enjoy knowing that others do not have that support.
> It gave me a "feel" for my career interest.

Among other advantages of the practicum, mentors observed that they felt good when helping someone, they developed

good listening skills, they learned to be patient and understanding, and a few overcame a tendency towards shyness. Mentors felt the greatest benefit of the project was showing younger students that somebody cared, and that if attitudes toward school could be improved, needless failures and dropouts could be prevented.

Mentors cited problems related to time: not enough time, lunch a poor choice of time, and needing a class period. Several suggested the program needed to last all year. Suggestions for improvement included making a peer counseling class, making a more extensive program, more training, and a variety of activities with assigned students.

The practicum was much discussed among students, as indicated by the frequency with which an older student requested to be involved. During preregistration, 55 students requested peer counseling as a class for the coming school year. On several occasions, a teacher requested that a freshman student be involved after implementation began.

Recommendations

The California Grab H.O.L.D. project (Phillips, 1980) retained 72 percent of targeted potential dropouts in school after three years' implementation, indicating that short-term measures may be insufficient for

achievement of positive outcomes desired for the present practicum. Comments from teachers, mentors, and target students indicate that older peers as role models, guides, and reinforcers were very beneficial. Negative comments addressed the issue of time, both in length of project and in choice of lunchtime meetings.

Recommendations for replication of the practicum are: (a) a longer implementation, and (b) meeting times other than lunch periods. In addition, targeted students need to be closely scrutinized to determine if mediating variables or historical background greatly reduce the chances of positive short-term results. Inherent to the success of a similar project is close supervision with regularly maintained meetings.

Plans for expansion of the practicum include the course offerings of Peer Counseling I and Peer Counseling II at the high school. A grant has been written that seeks to employ a part-time peer facilitator and a part-time third counselor for the coming school year, but plans are indefinite.

Dissemination

Many of the thirty-seven teachers who cooperated with the practicum have expressed an interest in the results. They will receive copies of the abstract and an invitation to read the report. The practicum will be

shared in its entirety with counselor colleagues at the middle school and at the high school who share the writer's interest in peers as helpers. Also, the writer is considering rewriting the practicum for publication in school counseling journals. The failure to achieve objectives during a three-month implementation period does not negate the positive information contained within the project.

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APPENDIX A

FRESHMEN STUDENT SURVEY

Name_____Age___

1st period English teacher_____

FRESHMEN STUDENT SURVEY

Welcome to the high school! You have been here a little over a month and we are interested in your opinions.

I. WHAT CLUBS HAVE YOU JOINED--if any?

II. WHAT OTHER AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES DO YOU PARTICIPATE IN?

III. ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH A SPORTS TEAM? Which one?

IV. WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT THE HIGH SCHOOL?

V. WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND TO DISLIKE?

VI. WRITE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON BACK OF PAPER.

APPENDIX B

ZERO/ABSENCE CHECKLIST

ZERO/ABSENCE CHECKLIST

Dear_____Date_____

_____, who is enrolled in your _____period class, is participating in the peer mentor program. We are trying to improve attendance, interest, and work toward no zeroes in your grade book. Please help us by filling in the calendar for last week with AB FOR ABSENCE and 0 FOR NO WORK TURNED IN. Return to the guidance office as soon as possible. Comments might be helpful.

Sincerely yours,

Peer Mentor

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY

COMMENTS:

APPENDIX C

STUDENT RESPONSE FORM FOR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

STUDENT RESPONSE FORM FOR EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

1. What clubs have you joined?

2. What after-school activities have you participated in?

3. Which sports teams have you tried out for?

4. What is the biggest problem, as you see it, about joining in after-school activities at the high school?

5. What are your plans for becoming involved in activities at the high school next year?

APPENDIX D

MENTOR EVALUATIONS OF PROGRAM

MENTOR EVALUATIONS OF PROGRAM

Using the scale, rate the items. 0=None, 1=Poor, 2=Okay, 3=Satisfactory, 4=Good, 5=Outstanding.

___My student showed improvement in study habits.

___My student showed increased interest in good grades.

___My student improved in his/her grades.

___My student has had good school attendance.

___My student has a better attitude about school.

___My student became involved in a school activity.

___My student shows an improved attitude about himself and about his/her capabilities.

___My student has one or more friends as a support group.

___My student does not give up as easily as he did.

___My student has learned how to set goals and reach them.

1. What is the major problem you have observed with this new program?

2. What are your suggestions for improving the program next year?

3. What advantages of the program would make it worth continuing?

4. Are there any personal benefits that you have gained?

APPENDIX E

TARGET STUDENTS' EVALUATIONS OF PROGRAM

TARGET STUDENTS' EVALUATIONS OF PROGRAM

Use rating numbers according to the scale: 0=None, 1=Poor, 2=Okay, 3=Satisfying, 4=Good, 5=Outstanding.

___I have improved in my study habits.

___I have improved my grades overall.

___I have more interest in, and take more responsibility for, making good grades.

___My school attendance has improved.

___My attitude toward school, and education, has improved.

___I have a better attitude about myself.

___I feel I am capable of controlling my grades and school success.

___I have learned something about making friends.

___I have chosen to get involved in extra-curricular activities.

___I do not give up as easily as I did.

___I have learned to set goals, and plan to reach them.

LIST ONE (or more) PROBLEM OF THE PROGRAM SO FAR:

GIVE AT LEAST ONE SUGGESTION FOR IMPROVEMENT OF PROGRAM:

WHAT MAJOR ADVANTAGE OF THE PROGRAM MAKES IT WORTH CONTINUING?

APPENDIX F

LETTER OF INVITATION

LETTER OF INVITATION

Dear_____:

On Wednesday, there will be a meeting in the library after school that may interest you. It involves some extra work, but the reward for you could be an "A" and an extra one-half credit in an exciting new course to be offered.

Juniors who are not involved in such activities as band, sports, cheerleading, etc. are being considered as big brothers and big sisters (peer mentors) for freshmen students. The extra one-half credit will be in Peer Counseling I and will be an extra, or eighth, class that counts in your second semester.

Attending the meeting for information on Wednesday does not commit you to anything. Feel free to bring a friend who is not eliminated by after-school activities. I hope to see you in the library Wednesday right after school.

Sincerely yours

Guidance Counselor

APPENDIX G

APPLICATION FOR PEER MENTOR PROGRAM

APPLICATION FOR PEER MENTOR PROGRAM

Name_____Phone No. _____

1. Are you willing to have lunch with your assigned student at least twice weekly?

2. Are you willing to make a weekly phone call to your assigned student?

3. Are you willing to meet for training sessions 5 times after school? (examine the dates closely)

4. Is there one period that you might easily miss (excused absence) on occasion?

5. Do you have A, B, or C lunch period?

6. Write your schedule and teachers below:

1st_____Teacher_____

2nd_____Teacher_____

3rd_____Teacher_____

4th_____Teacher_____

5th_____Teacher_____

6th_____Teacher_____

7th_____Teacher_____

TRAINING SESSIONS: Dec. 4, 5, 10, 12, Jan.8 (five days)

I give permission for my son/daughter to participate in the after-school training sessions for the Peer Mentor Program. I understand that an extra 1/2 credit in Peer Counseling will be earned, grades based on attendance and notebooks. Parent permission _____

APPENDIX H

REFERRAL FORM FOR TARGETED FRESHMEN STUDENTS

REFERRAL FORM FOR TARGETED FRESHMEN STUDENTS

Name_____ Teacher_____

1. Attitude in general that causes concern:

2. General comments about grades from your observations:

3. Absences:

4. Social observations:

5. Personality description:

6. In your opinion, does this student lack academic focus?

7. In your opinion, does this student need friends?

8. In your opinion, is this student a potential dropout?

9. In your opinion, could this student benefit from peer counseling with a role model student who has limited training?